

OUR FAMILIAR STRANGER'S: PERVASIVE URBAN COMPUTING

We live and interact across a wildly diverse set of physical spaces. We each formulate our own personal meaning of place using a myriad of observable cues such as public-private, large-small, daytime-nighttime, loud-quiet, and crowded-empty. However, it is the people with which we share such spaces that dominate our perception of place. Sometimes these people are friends, family and colleagues. More often, and particularly in public urban spaces we inhabit, the individuals who affect us are ones that we repeatedly observe and yet do not directly interact with – our *Familiar Strangers*. We have performed several experiments and studies that have lead to a design for a personal, body-worn, wireless device that extends the Familiar Stranger relationship while respecting the delicate, yet important, constraints of our feelings and relationships with strangers in public places.

The research goal is to identify the properties and phenomenon of the Familiar Stranger relationships we currently observe in public places. We believe that extensions to this relationship using small personal wireless objects can allow individuals to more acutely gauge their social relationship to people, places, and crowds around them over time. We also believe that such a device is capable of encouraging community solidarity, even transitory solidarity, in places where it is currently difficult to build such ties. Overall, such a system has a great potential to allow individuals to gain an improved sense of belonging within and across their communities, cultivating new views of comfort, safety, and inclusion. As a result, we hope that such a tool may expand and improve our own impressions and beliefs of the strangers with which we share our daily lives. However, we are ultimately designing for ambiguity, leaving to the users to modify, re-appropriate, play, and adapt the system across a myriad of unintended uses.